DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 108 082 CG 009 901

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TITLE Student Development and Experimental-Gestalt Therapy.
PUB DATE [8 Mar 75]
NOTE 9p.; Paper presented at the Annual Convention of the American College Personnel Association (50th, Atlanta, Georgia, March 5-8, 1975) Not available in hard copy due to marginal legibility of original document

EDRS PRICE MF-$0.76 PLUS POSTAGE. HC Not Available from EDRS.
DESCRIPTORS *Counseling Theories; Counselor Role; Educational Innovation; Higher Education; *Program Descriptions; Social Change; Speeches; *Student Development; *Student Personnel Workers; *Therapy
IDENTIFIERS Gestalt Therapy; *Tomorrow Higher Education Project (THE)

ABSTRACT

The rapid pace at which societal changes have occurred in our culture has presented a tremendous challenge to higher education. A major attempt to meet this challenge has been the Tomorrow's Higher Education (THE) Project. The goal of the THE Project is to reconceptualize student affairs work in a way that will provide a measure of creative input from the student affairs profession toward the shaping of post-secondary education for the future. Student development specialists can identify their own counseling/life style as Experiential-Gestalt and clearly recognize how Experiential-Gestalt philosophy and process can contribute to the goals presented the THE Project and facilitate the student development specialist in fulfilling their functions. This paper briefly reviews the concepts of student development, specifically those which are summarized by the THE Project Statement. It offers a brief review of Experiential-Gestalt Therapy, relating the concepts to the THE Project Statement. A section is devoted to the Student Development Specialist. As A Model utilizing the skills and behavior of the Experiential-Gestalt therapist/person. And finally, it explores specific Experiential-Gestalt methods found useful in facilitating the development of college students. (Author)

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STUDENT DEVELOPMENT AND EXPERIENTIAL-GESTALT THERAPY

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The rapid pace at which societal changes have occurred in our culture has presented a tremendous challenge to higher education. A major attempt to meet this challenge has been the Tomorrow's Higher Education (THE) Project (THE - phase I, Brown - 1972; phase II, 1974). The goal of the THE Project is to reconceptualize student affairs work in a way that will provide a measure of creative input from the student affairs profession toward the shaping of post-secondary education for the future (THE - phase II, 1974).

As a student development specialist/person, I identify my own counseling/life style as Experiential-Gestalt and clearly recognize how Experiential-Gestalt philosophy and process can contribute to the goals presented by the THE Project and facilitate the student development specialist in fulfilling their functions.

In this paper, I will briefly review the concepts of student development, specifically those which are summarized by the THE Project Statement (1974). Then I will offer a brief review of Experiential-Gestalt Therapy, relating the concepts to the THE Project Statement. A section is then devoted to the Student Development Specialist As A Model utilizing the skills and behavior of the Experiential-Gestalt therapist/person. And finally, specific Experiential-Gestalt methods will be explored that I have found useful when facilitating the development of college students.

Student Development - "THE" Project

In developing a need for a student development model, Brown (1972) says that higher education must respond differently than it has in the past if it is going to respond adequately to the challenge that changes in society and student life represent. "In reviewing the current literature pointing in the direction of student development, there exist many challenges and suggestions. It has been clearly stated that student personnel must expand to meet the needs and challenges to today's students (Brown, 1972; Chapman, 1969; Hurst & Ivey, 1971; Kaufman, 1970; O'Banion, Thurston, & Gulden, 1970; Shaffer, 1967; Sheldon, 1968; Williamson, 1970)(Witchel, 1973, pp. 13-14)."

"An emphasis is being placed on a "proactive" approach to human development (Foulds & Guinan, 1969, 1970; Hurst & Ivey, 1971; Witchel, 1972), stressing the facilitation of growth, learning, and human relations (Committee on the Student in Higher Education, 1968; Hurst & Ivey, 1971; Ivey & Morrill, 1970; Knott, 1971; O'Banion, Thurston, & Gulden, 1970; Wrenn, 1970) and using the skills of the behavioral sciences (Committee on the Student in Higher Education, 1968; Grant, 1968; Hurst & Ivey, 1971; Lloyd-Jones, 1966; O'Banion, Thurston, & Gulden, 1970)(Witchel, 1973, p. 14)."

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Grant and others, while working with the Council of Student Personnel Associations Commission on Professional Development (1971), provided a student development philosophy of education. The basic points of this statement are:

> Human beings seek to function more and more fully in order to increase their capabilities of interacting as equals with their physical and human environments. Their goal is self-directed behavior. Education is an institution of society designed to stimulate and facilitate the total development of each individual so that his personal actions and reactions are fully effective and efficient . . . . The heart of the educational institution is the educator who has achieved or is achieving a high personal and professional development and thus can serve as an instructor and model for students seeking a similar area and level of development . . . . Student development educators apply their competence especially to the process of growth in collaboration with students and other educators (p. 2).

The "THE" Project (1974) presents the concept of student development as the integration of the cognitive mastery of knowledge with the development of persons along such dimensions as cultural awareness, development of a value system, self-awareness, interpersonal skills, and community responsibility. The "THE" Project's view of student development includes students, faculty, and staff - all of whom are involved in the process of learning and developing as human beings. "The viable student development program takes students wherever they are, developmentally, at the moment and facilitates growth for the future (THE, 1974)."

The THE Model encourages a competency based approach to staffing. Competencies necessary to create an atmosphere for optimal student and institutional growth are goal setting, assessment and strategies for student development, (teaching, consultation, and milieu management). These competencies will be more fully described as they are related to Experiential-Gestalt concepts. (See "THE" Statement, 1974, for a very complete picture of this model.)

In summary, I believe that the goal of Student Development is the facilitation of "self-aware, self-directing" human beings. My perception of Experiential-Gestalt therapy/living includes "self-awareness and self-direction" as its primary goals. Hopefully the integration of Experiential-Gestalt methods with the intentions of Student Development will become clear as you continue reading.

Experiential-Gestalt Therapy and "THE"

Experiential-Gestalt therapy combines Gestalt-awareness techniques (i.e., focusing or attending to present awareness of self, including feelings and body sensations, and environment; using fantasy and dreams) (Perls, et. al.,

1951; Stevens, 1971), the individual focus or hot seat workshop model of Fritz Perls (1969), and experiential psychotherapy methods (Gendlin, 1973; Kempler, 1967; Whitaker & Malone, 1953), focusing strongly on the on-going relationship between the therapist (student development specialist) and client (student or other person).

Following are some basic principles of Experiential-Gestalt therapy. I will relate these basic concepts to aspects of the THE Project Statement -

1. Awareness: A major ingredient of Experiential-Gestalt therapy is my awareness of personal experience. There are three ways to focus awareness - awareness of my present inside world (i.e., I'm aware of breathing, tensing, moving, laughing, hurting, and other inner events); awareness of my present environment (i.e., I'm aware of seeing, hearing, tasting, touching, and sensing the world around me); awareness of fantasy, including all mental activity beyond present on-going experience (i.e., imagining, thinking, guessing, planning, predicting, remembering the past, anticipating the future). A healthy person will experience a flow between these kinds of awareness rather than get stuck with only one.

Some of the key dimensions of Student development are "self-determination", "self-direction", and "fully developed persons". Learning to be aware of my experience is a first step towards "self-directedness". The degree to which I am able to be aware of my self (needs, feelings, fantasies) will allow me to make personal assessments and set goals; which in turn will facilitate me in becoming a fully developed person.

2. The here-and-now - paying attention to what is happening in the present rather than the remembered past or anticipated future, is an encouraged aspect of the Experiential-Gestalt therapy. Being aware of my own here-and-now behavior (including body movement, fantasies) offers me messages and knowledge about what I am doing, what I may want, and how I may be stopping myself from feeling better. The future and past may be brought into the present through the use of fantasy. According to the Student Development Model, the viable program takes students wherever they are at the moment; assessing a student at their present developmental level.

3. I-and-thou - Experiential-Gestalt therapy involves the interaction of at least two persons - me and you. I pay attention to my awareness of me and how I experience you, and share this with you, hopefully, you will do the same with me. Together, by each of us saying and doing those things which are pertinent to our needs, we will discover new possibilities towards increasing our potentials. The Student Development Model suggests more person-to-person, rather than teacher-to-student relationships. All persons in the academic community are in the process of developing and "colleague-type" relationships will better facilitate personal growth. I will describe how the student development specialist serves as a valuable model (in an I-and-thou relationship) later in this paper.

4. Whole person - Experiential-Gestalt therapy recognizes that a person works as a whole, rather than an entity split into dichotomies such as mind and body, or thinking and feeling. My thoughts, feelings, bodily expressions, fantasies and dreams are all interrelated and contribute to my "wholeness". The Student Development Model includes growth in all areas of personal development - intellectual, personal-social, aesthetic, cultural and psychomotor dimensions. "Cognitive and affective development are considered essential to the educational missions of post-secondary institutions (THE, 1974)."

Witchel (1974) offers a more complete review of Experiential-Gestalt principles and practices.

Student Development Specialist As a Model

"The heart of the educational institution is the educator who has achieved or is achieving a high personal and professional development and thus can serve as an instructor and model for students seeking a similar area and level of development (COSPA Commission on Professional Development, 1971, pg. 2)."

The literature has focused on the characteristics and future role of the student development specialist. "She or he need to be flexible (Ivey & Morrill, 1970; Winston, 1972), active (Hurst & Ivey, 1971), autonomous (Silverman, 1971), aggressive (COSPA, 1971), imaginative (Shaffer, 1968), and a whole person acting as a role model embodying a technique (Rothman & Keener, 1970) (Witchel, 1973, p. 15)." The Student Development Specialist can easily develop a long list of "shoulds". I have seen some very competent professionals become ineffective by creating an impossible task of being the "ideal" Student Development Specialist.

Rules like these are developed -

"I must always be a feeling person."

"I must always know how to handle any situation."

"I must always be a healthy model for students."

"I must always be a very creative person."

These are the same kind of rules that counselors, including experiential-gestalt therapists could trap themselves into creating.

My own "model" as both a student development specialist and experiential-gestalt therapist is "to stop acting like a model and be a human being." This model involves my being who I am and sharing me in a genuine way. It is true that I want to be as "creative...flexible...autonomous...competent...knowing" as possible, and yet I know that to demand or expect these qualities of myself is unhealthy. To be human is to succeed and fail, to care, to cry, to be miserable, to love, to be exuberant, to be interested as well as indifferent, to take risks, and so on.

If we as student development specialists want students to be aware of and express their feelings then we need to share our feelings (i.e., hurt, joy, sadness, anger, etc.) with students. If we want students to relate openly and in healthy ways then our "person-to-person" relationships with students and others need to be open and include our personal experience, and not respond out of a "role". My own relationships include disagreement as well as harmony, anger and love, fun and tears! And at times I really don't want to be around other people. If I allow myself to be who I am, then can I only serve as a "model" for students/persons wanting to be who they are or "more fully developed persons." A human paradox is when a student development specialist is facilitating students to reach a point of development which he or she has not personally achieved. An important part of my own model is that I am still discovering areas in my own life that I need to grow in. I haven't and never will reach a point that I can say "I have achieved all of the growth that is possible for me."

The Experiential-Gestalt techniques to follow have been used both with students and in workshops with student development specialists. To me they are more than techniques because I discovered a great deal from utilizing these methods in my own personal development.

Experiential-Gestalt Experiments or Techniques

1. Use of the awareness continuum - the use of the awareness continuum, the "how" of experience, is absolutely basic to Experiential-Gestalt therapy. Many of the Gestalt-awareness experiments direct a person to their awareness continuum. The awareness continuum is an affective way to guiding an individual to the firm bedrock of experience and away from the endless verbalizations, explanations, interpretations. Awareness of body feelings, sensations, and perceptions constitutes our most certain - knowledge. Relying on information provided in awareness is the best method of implementing Perls's dictum "lose your mind and come to your senses." The experiment is simple; say statements beginning with "Right now I'm aware of . . . . ." and complete the statement. I usually discover important information about my present situation when doing this experiment.

2. "It" and "I" language - This experiment relates to the semantics of responsibility and involvement. My experience tells me that many persons (including myself at times) refer to their bodies, acts, and behaviors in the third person, "it" language, for example "it is trembling" (referring to the hand). I suggest to the person to change "it is trembling" to "I am trembling", which may allow him or her to identify more clearly with his/her trembling self, and assume responsibility for self. Changing "it" to "I" is one example of a Gestalt suggestion which allows me to more fully experience who I am and assume responsibility for myself. Some others are expressed by Foulds (1972, pg. 51): "If and but are replaced by and, I can't is replaced by I won't, I feel by I am, and I feel guilty by I resent and I demand. It and you are changed to I, and verbs are substituted for nouns. Why, because, should, ought, supposed to, and have to are worked with in depth by asking the person to verbalize his rationalizations."

3. Reversals - a person is asked to experiment with the reversal of a behavior that he or she commonly expresses. For example, a person who claims to be shy and quiet is asked to "role-play" being a loud and extroverted person. The person is asked to be very sensitive to the experience and may discover some new parts of self (i.e., may feel more comfortable than expected, as well as enjoy being loud and extroverted).

4. Games of dialogue - When conflicts appear, a person is asked to create an actual dialogue between the two components of self. The dialogue game can be used between various parts of the body (i.e., right hand vs. left hand, lower half of body vs. upper half), as well as be developed between the person and some significant other, whether the significant other is present or not. The person simply addresses the other person (in an empty chair) and creates a dialogue in the here and now. The dialogue typically starts with disagreement and fighting, and ends with understanding and appreciation.

5. Playing the projection - A person looks around the room and picks an object that stands out vividly. He or she then identifies with this object, i.e., making statements as if he or she were the object; describing it by saying "I" instead of "it". Interesting knowledge occurs when using this technique. An example is a person who identified with the drapes and reported feeling very drab and "hanging around" most of the time. The person became more aware of his own laziness and need to become more active.

6. Structured fantasy journeys - There are countless fantasies that can be suggested to a person or group of people to experience. A person can be asked to become a rock, tree, bird, house, any animal, and so forth, and to have an experience as that particular creature or object. Instructions are given as follows, for example, "Close your eyes and imagine that you are a tree . . . notice what kind of tree you are and what kind of personality you have as a tree (silence) . . . Now notice your bark, are you hard, smooth flakey, or what? (silence) . . . now, feel your roots, are they deep or are they offering little support to you? (silence) . . . take a look at your surroundings, what do you see, are you alone? (silence) . . . be back in this room when you're finished."

As a person shares his or her fantasy they are asked to speak in first person, present tense as if the fantasy was taking place again. Most fantasies can easily be related to personal behavior or characteristics. After describing all or part of the fantasy, a person may simply be asked whether a part or parts of the fantasy correlate with some aspect of themself; people familiar with the process of working with their fantasies can usually make a quick connection between their fantasy-self and real-self and discover something about their present experience. College students really enjoy exploring fantasy and dreamwork.

7. Dream work - In Gestalt therapy dreams are used to integrate, not interpret. Perls called the dream the "Royal road to integration and is an existential message of what's missing in our lives, what we avoid doing and living (Perls, 1969, pg. 76)." Perls lets the person act out his dream. Since

he regards each part of the dream as a projection, each fragment of the dream (i.e., person, prop, or mood) is considered an alienated part of the individual. The person plays each part and an encounter ensues between the divided parts (in first person, singular) frequently leading to new learning.

These have been the more valuable Experiential-Gestalt experiments for me in working with college students and others. This has been an overview; if you plan to utilize some of these experiments see -

1. Gestalt Therapy (Perls, Hefferline & Goodman, 1951)

2. Awareness (Stevens, 1971) - a very complete source of awareness experiments.

3. Dreams and Nightmares (Downing & Marmorstein, 1973)

4. Fantasy and Experiential-Gestalt Therapy (Witchel, 1974; available from author).

5. My doctoral dissertation (Witchel, 1973) see references. An outline of 10 week workshop for student development specialists-in-training, using Experiential-Gestalt methods.

Summary

I have reviewed the concepts of student development, including the recent "THE" Statement. I offered a brief review of Experiential-Gestalt therapy, relating the concepts of the "THE" Statement. I also described my personal model as a student development specialist and Experiential-Gestalt experiments that I have found useful when working with college students.

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